1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
0012 Malekula 0012

stories of men who have acquired such superlatively high Maki rank—there are none living now—that they have been strong enough, not without raising such storms in the community as almost to wreck it, to break the taboo and re-establish, for themselves alone, spiritual contact with the mother's milk by eating from the same fire as women.[1] Such men who have completed the circle between childhood and divinity are regarded with awe and terror as being almost equal to ghosts.

It is well, therefore, to wait until the meal is over, the pipes lighted,[2] and, with the gathering twilight lit up by moon and stars and by the smouldering fire, to approach with some casual appropriate remark and then sit down and listen, not with the head only, but, as the natives say, the "belly," or what we should call the heart.

Debates.

Another type of meeting from which women are excluded but which the circumspect stranger may attend is that of the debates, which in fine weather are held in the dancing-ground or in wet weather in the *ghamal*. These are described by Godefroy [3] as being either "small" debates, which are a kind of communal recreation when a little is said about everything, or "grand" debates, announced by the sounding of gongs. Such "grand" debates are held only on important occasions, when, for example, a woman has eloped or some insult has been perpetrated against one of the influential members of the clan, or else to announce the date of some rite, or because certain old men wish to summon an offender before this the only tribunal that exists.

If held in the dancing-ground, each member of the clan takes his place at the correct spot indicated by his rank. The oldest members take up their position on the Upper Side, close to the gongs; if there are five or six of them, they squat on their heels, in the form of a square; three paces behind, towards the middle of the ground, sit those one rank inferior to that of the old men; yet further off, and separated by the same distance from those superior to them, are a group of young men; finally, that of the older boys. All speak in a low voice, though the elders talk rather more loudly than the rest. They discuss the subject of their meeting.

[1] The story of one such will be told in a later volume on Atchin.

[2] A European innovation, hand-maiden of the trader who, by creating this artificial craving which occupies some of the native's surplus energy now that his work in the gardens has been so notably lightened by the introduction of iron, has established a tobacco-currency which, as the natives themselves despairingly say, "goes up in smoke," and must be eternally renewed, for the white man's profit.

[3] Godefroy, 1, 1933, pp. 40-1. The word for these debates in his spelling is *sisilakuarean*, from the verb *sisilakuav*. The Atchin equivalent is the verb *tsil-tsilewere*, whence on that island I had conferred on me the half-joking title of Melteg-tsilewere on account of my long sessions with informants. (Melteg is one of the titles conferred on men of high rank in the Maki, see pp. 289, 432.)

1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
0012 Malekula 0012

After a time one old man will get up and close the debate by announcing in a loud voice the conclusion that has been reached. The young men have taken no part whatever in the discussion, the whole debate having taken place between the members of the first two ranks.

Position of women.

It is assumed often, on account of the dichotomy between the sexes already mentioned, that the position of women in these islands is a very inferior one. This is, however, only partially the case. It is of course true that they are not held in such high esteem as in the matrilineal islands further north. Nevertheless their position is infinitely better than among the Big Nambas who inhabit the neighbouring plateau of North Malekula. Though in the Small Islands men occasionally beat their wives and white men tell gruesome tales of ham-stringing by jealous husbands, such actions are rare and are by no means generally approved. If matters get too bad, the wife can leave and go back to her own people. If she persists in not returning and has the backing of her own relatives, these pay back the pigs the husband has given as bride-price, and she is free to marry again. But all the numerous minor pigs ceremonially presented to the wife's relatives are not paid back, so that the husband is the loser, even in pigs, and has therefore, if from this point of view only (which of course is not the only one), every inducement to make his wife's lot a contented one. During pregnancy and for some months after the birth of a child she is, moreover, carefully, almost fiercely, watched over by her own people, who at times take possession of the husband's house in order to ensure her welfare. Nor is the women's lot in the gardens too hard. Though she does indeed do most of the carrying, specially heavy loads are carried by the men, and though in the matter of time she is busy for longer periods, the heavy work of cutting down the trees, burning the scrub, and generally clearing the ground is done by men, while in the planting of the yams both share, and it is not unusual to see a husband with his wife and children all busy on the same yam-mound. At home, she feeds most of the pigs, but the most valuable tuskers are cared for by the men who are to sacrifice them. Women also have certain Lodges of their own which men may not enter, and receive complimentary titles when their menfolk perform the Maki rite.[1] They are said also even to perform a kind of secret Maki of their own.

Interior of houses. Tools and other domestic objects.

On the evening of any ordinary day, when no particular rite is in progress, the men and women, after seeing to the safety of the canoes in which they have returned from their mainland gardens, having each taken their own separate paths up from the shore and then shared the

[1] See p. 394.